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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater Beginning Teacher Assistance Program. The program, operational since 1974, is collaborative, uniting the personnel and resources of the University, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and small to medium sized school districts. Beginning teachers are provided with a structured mentoring program. Mentors are offered basic and advanced training in mentoring skills, and they are given the opportunity to explore important topics and issues related to beginning teacher socialization, teaching as an occupation, and the role of mentoring in beginning teacher induction. The report provides: (1) the program's context and background; (2) an overview of the program addressing information dissemination, program consultants, monthly meetings, other mentoring activities, mentor selection and training, the Wisconsin Improvement Program Grant, and the program's advisory committee; (3) program structures, costs, and resources; (4) feedback provided by 1990-91 participants; and (5) future directions that include more linkages between present and past participants. (LL)

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TITLE: **Getting Off to a Good Start: A Collaborative Mentoring Program for Beginning Teachers**

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ABSTRACT

The University of Wisconsin--Whitewater **Beginning Teacher Assistance Program** has served school teachers throughout southeastern Wisconsin since 1974, making it one of the longest continuously operating mentoring programs for teachers in the United States. The collaborative nature of the Program accounts for much of its success. The Program unites the personnel and resources of the University, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, and small to medium sized school districts in assisting beginning teachers by providing them with a structured mentoring program. Mentors are offered basic and advanced training in mentoring skills, and the opportunity to explore important topics and issues related to beginning teacher socialization, teaching as an occupation, and the role of mentoring in beginning teacher induction. This paper highlights the structure and costs of the Program, and includes feedback provided by the 1990-91 participants.

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Context and Background

The University of Wisconsin--Whitewater Beginning Teacher Assistance Program has existed since 1974, making it one of the longest continuously operating programs for beginning teacher in the United States. Although its name and structure have evolved over the years, its goal of offering school districts a high quality program aimed at providing beginning teachers with support remains the same. Since its inception, the Program has served 226 beginning teachers (K-12 regular and special education) working in 24 districts throughout southeastern Wisconsin. Since 1984-85, an average of 24 beginning teachers and their mentors have participated in the Program each year. Most of these teachers work in small to medium sized school districts. For example, the 1991-92 participants in the Program are employed in districts having three to six schools, and enrollments ranging from approximately 1,000 to 5,000 students. Throughout its history, the Program has been collaborative in design, combining the personnel and resources of UW--Whitewater, school districts, and the Wisconsin Improvement Program, an agency of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. The Wisconsin Improvement Program is a consortium of 23 teacher preparation institutions that promotes and encourages the training and education of teachers throughout their careers.

In contrast to other states, assistance for beginning teachers, typically in the form of mentoring programs, is not mandated in Wisconsin. However, many mentoring programs do exist throughout the state. For example, some large school districts operate their own mentoring programs, while some smaller districts turn to the regional Cooperative Educational Service Agencies for help in providing assistance to beginning teachers.

Overview of the UW-Whitewater Beginning Teacher Assistance Program

The school districts participating in the Beginning Teacher Assistance Program do so voluntarily on a needs basis. In general, the districts define "beginning teachers" as persons who are starting their career, thereby excluding experienced teachers who are new to a district.

Information Dissemination

As part of each yearly cycle, the Program Director provides information about the Program to teachers, principals, and district administrators employed in school districts within the service delivery area of the University (approximately 670 square miles). Sometimes this information is provided through informal meetings and telephone conversations. During the spring the Director organizes informational meetings for teachers who may be thinking about serving as a mentor in the Program in the future. In mid-summer, the Director mails information about the Program, designed to accommodate approximately 25 beginning teacher/mentor teams, to district administrators. While the Director encourages the identification of Program participants as soon as possible before the beginning of the school year, this is often not possible for a variety of reasons, especially the late hiring of beginning teachers. Occasionally, participants are not identified until after the beginning of the school year. Once identified, Program participants are mailed information about the Program and their part in it.

Program Consultants

A Program Consultant is assigned to each beginning teacher/mentor team. Since 1990, the role of Program Consultant has been filled by two persons. One Program

Consultant is a kindergarten teacher who teaches in the morning and who was in the Program as a beginning teacher. In addition, during 1989-90 she taught one section of "Principles of Mentoring" for mentors enrolled in the Program. The second Program Consultant is a retired middle school principal. In the past, he was the principal for a beginning teacher and mentor in the Program. The Program Consultants serve several functions. They meet with the beginning teacher/mentor teams to which they are assigned twice (and sometimes more often) each semester to provide assistance as requested, to monitor the mentoring process, and to provide a link between the beginning teacher/mentor team and the Program Director and the University resources to which he has access. These meetings take place in the participants' school. The Program Consultants also attend the monthly meetings, respond to the beginning teachers' *Professional Development Journal*, and recommend final grades for the beginning teachers' courses. In addition, the Program Consultants make recommendations to the Director about a variety of Program elements (e.g., structure of monthly meetings, topics for presentation and presenters, end-of-year survey).

Monthly Meetings

Nine monthly meetings held on the university campus are a central feature of the Program. Two of the meetings (September and April) are all-day meetings. Six monthly meetings are held from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The last meeting in May is held in conjunction with an Inservice Dinner for cooperating teachers.

The monthly meetings serve an important function by enabling beginning teachers and mentors to meet with each other outside of their workday, and also to interact with other beginning teachers and mentors employed in other school districts. Snacks and beverages are

provided at five meetings, and meals are provided at the September, December, April, and May meetings. The structure of the meetings varies, but generally includes a presentation on a topic of interest to beginning teachers and mentors. Some topics, which vary from year to year, are practical in nature (e.g., Parent/Teacher Communications) while others are more theoretical (e.g., Research on Effective Teaching). Presenters include Program participants (present and past), teachers and administrators from the participants' school districts, UW-Whitewater faculty, and others. During several meetings, time is set aside for the beginning teachers and mentors to meet separately to share experiences and discuss relevant topics, usually under the guidance of one of the Program Consultants.

Other Mentoring Activities

The beginning teachers and their mentors are expected to meet weekly. Guidance is provided regarding the purposes for this meeting (e.g., beginning teacher setting goals, mentor leading the beginning teacher in a guided reflection of a significant event). However, participants are encouraged to use this meeting time constructively as they feel is most appropriate. Besides the weekly meetings, mentors are expected to visit the beginner's classroom at least once each semester. Typically, mentors visit the beginner's classroom more frequently, and the beginners also visit their mentor's classroom. How often these visits take place depends on the inclination of each beginning teacher/mentor team, and on the ability to provide for class coverage, when necessary.

During each semester, the beginning teachers are required to enroll in a three graduate credit course, "Residency in Teaching." Enrollment in this course is limited to participants in the Program because they are given credit for contact hours with the Program

Director (who is the instructor for the course), with the Program Consultant, and with their mentor, as part of the overall structure of the Program. The beginning teachers are also required to complete a *Professional Development Journal* during the course of the year. The assigned topics (developed by the Director with input from the Program Consultants) are intended to provide the beginning teachers with a structured opportunity to reflect on their experiences and on their induction into teaching. The following is one of the topics included during 1991-92 *Professional Development Journal* assignment:

> **Cheers and Fears.** [Before the beginning of the year or early in the semester] Describe three or more things that you most look forward to in teaching, and three or more things that you're uncertain or apprehensive about.

This journal is read by each beginning teacher's Program Consultant and by the Program Director.

Mentor Selection and Training

Selection of mentors is controlled by school districts, and usually by building principals. In some districts, the local teachers' union is also involved in this process. The Director provides guidance regarding recommended principles and practices in selecting mentors and pairing them with beginning teachers. However, neither the Director nor the Program Consultants control this process.

In mid-August, the Director hold a voluntary meeting for identified mentors to provide additional information about the Program, to answer questions, and to address concerns. This represents an introduction to mentoring. However, generally few teachers

who will serve as mentors attend this meeting, often because they have not been identified by that time.

The Program Director is the instructor for two three graduate credit courses on mentoring. The introductory course, "Principles of Mentoring," is offered during the fall semester. Mentors new to the Program and who have not taken the course are required to do so. An advanced course, "Enhancing the Role of the Mentor," is offered during the spring semester. Enrollment in this course is optional for mentors who have already taken "Principles of Mentoring." As part of each course, mentors must attend six 2 1/2 hour classes held on campus. Enrollment in both courses is limited to participants of the Program who are given credit for contact hours with the Instructor/Program Director and Program Consultants during various Program activities.

"Principles of Mentoring" provides the mentors with a conceptual framework for understanding beginning teacher socialization and the mentoring of beginning teachers. It provides them with opportunity to explore roles played by mentors and to analyze and develop mentoring skills (e.g., establishing rapport, conducting classroom observations, conferencing skills). In addition, it provides them with background for continuing and advanced study of pertinent topics. Importantly, this course also provides mentors with a forum for sharing and assimilating their experiences as mentors. "Enhancing the Role of the Mentor" is more theoretical in nature. It provides mentors with an opportunity to explore in more detail the influence of work experiences on beginning teachers from the perspective of occupational socialization and within the framework of schools as complex, formal organizations. In addition, it includes such topics as stages of teacher development and

principles of adult learning. Finally, like "Principles of Mentoring," this advanced course gives mentors a chance to share their mentoring experiences and to benefit from the experiences of other mentors.

Wisconsin Improvement Program Grant

Each beginning teacher/mentor team is eligible to apply for a small grant of approximately $150 to $200 from the Wisconsin Improvement Program. This grant is supports professional development activities in which beginning teachers and their mentors participate together. Typically, this grant is used to pay for expenses associate with attending a professional conference (e.g., registration fees, travel, meals, lodging). In school districts having more than one beginning teacher/mentor team, teams can pool their grants for special projects, including inservice activities which they plan and implement on their own.

Beginning Teacher Assistance Program Advisory Committee

Members of the Beginning Teacher Assistance Program Advisory Committee include representatives from the schools, the University, and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Serving on the committee are two teachers in their second or third year of teaching who participated in the Program during their first year. There are also two mentors, a building principal, and a district administrator from participating school districts. Representing the University are two faculty members, one from the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the other from the Department of Special Education, and the Director of the Office of Field Experiences. The Program Consultants are also members of this group. Finally, the Director of Beginning Teacher Assistance Programs for the

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction is also a member of this group. This advisory committee meets two to three times each year and provides the Director with a forum for discussing Program modifications.

Program Costs and Resources

The Beginning Teacher Assistance Program provides a high quality program for participating school districts. The costs of the Program are borne by the University, the school districts, and many of the Program participants themselves.

University

Personnel. The Program Director holds a joint appointment in the College of Education as the Associate Director of Field Experiences and in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction as an Assistant Professor. A significant portion of his work involves administering the Program and serving as instructor for "Principles of Mentoring," "Enhancing the Role of the Mentor," and "Residency in Teaching." In addition, the position requires the Director to conduct research on mentoring and related topics. The remuneration for the Program Consultants is based on the rate of pay for ad hoc University supervisors of student teachers. The tuition generated by the courses in which the beginning teachers and mentors enroll covers this expense.

Program budget. The University provides the Program Director with a budget used to cover Program costs, including supplies, postage, telephone, parking permits, honoraria, and a student assistant (20 hours per week). Other expenses covered by this budget include an administration fee charged by the Wisconsin Improvement Program, stipends for the

mentors ($80.00 per semester) and some costs associated with research and travel.

School Districts

The costs to school districts for participating in the Program vary. All districts must pay $300 per beginning teacher/mentor team to the Wisconsin Improvement Program. Of this amount, half is available to the Program Director for costs associated with monthly meetings (food, beverages, and honoraria). The other half is available to beginning teacher/mentor teams in the form of grants to cover costs associated with professional development activities. In addition, school districts are obliged to provide for class coverage for the beginning teachers and mentors for the all-day meetings on campus in September and April. This ordinarily necessitates hiring substitute teachers.

There are additional costs which vary from district to district. One possible cost is providing class coverage for beginning teachers and mentors so that they can visit each other's classes. In many cases, class coverage is provided without additional cost to the district (e.g., the principal takes over the class). More importantly, among participating districts, there is a wide range of support and incentives for beginning teachers and mentors. In one district, for example, beginning teachers are required to participate in the Program as a condition of employment; these beginning teachers and their mentors are each provided with a stipend of $1,100 which more than covers the cost of tuition. In other districts, Program participants are reimbursed for only a portion of the tuition costs.

Program Participants

Beginning teachers are required to enroll each semester in a three graduate credit course, "Residency in Teaching." The in-state tuition for this course during 1991-92 was

$386.07. The six credits earned in these courses fulfill the 5 credit requirement for license renewal in Wisconsin and can often be used to fulfill elective requirements in masters degree programs. Mentors new to the Program must enroll during the fall semester in "Principles of Mentoring," a three graduate credit course. All mentors who have successfully completed this course can take the advanced course, "Enhancing the Role of the Mentor," which is optional. As with "Residency in Teaching," the mentor courses fulfill license renewal requirements and can often be used as electives in graduate degree program.

1990-91 Participant Feedback

In April, 1991, the 1990-91 Program participants completed a comprehensive survey designed to solicit their feedback. Nineteen of 24 beginning teachers (79%) and all 22 mentors (100%) completed the survey. The surveys contained 82 items for the beginning teachers and 75 items for the mentor. Most of the items used a 5-point Likert-type scale (5 = very strongly agree, in favor, recommended; 1 = very strongly disagree, not in favor, not recommended). In addition, most of the items appeared on both surveys, while some were intended specifically for the beginning teachers or for the mentors. The surveys were designed by the Program Director in consultation with the Program Consultants.

Program Elements

With respect to key features of the Program, participants favored requiring the mentor to observe the beginning teacher at least once each semester (Beginning Teacher Mean = 4.16; Mentor Teacher Mean = 4.18) and requiring weekly meetings between the beginning teacher and his or her mentor (BT = 3.74; MT = 4.09). In terms of the *Professional*

Development Journal, the mentors were more in favor of eliminating it and substituting for it other tasks (MT = 3.19) than were the beginning teachers (BT = 2.53). Both the beginning teachers and the mentors favored allowing for optional activities in place of some of the *Professional Development Journal* entries (BT = 3.79; MT = 4.00).

Monthly Meetings

Several survey items focused on the monthly meetings. From among 25 suggested topics for monthly meeting, three were common to the top five choices for the beginning teachers and the top six choices for the mentors: motivating students (BT = 4.47; MT = 4.05), discipline and classroom management (BT = 4.32; MT = 3.77), and parent/teacher communication and conferences (BT = 4.11; MT = 4.09). Beginning teachers also included working with children from dysfunctional families (BT = 4.05) and working with low achievers (BT = 4.00) among their top five choices. Mentors included time management skills for teachers (MT = 3.95), professional development possibilities for teachers (3.41), and cooperative learning (MT = 3.41) among their top six choices.

Both beginning teachers and mentors favored inviting experienced classroom teachers to serve as presenters at monthly meetings rather than university or school district personnel (BT = 4.16; MT = 3.75). Other features of the monthly meetings examined included location, provision of food or snacks, opportunities for beginning teachers and mentors to meet separately, and other people to be invited to the meetings. Although during 1990-91 some of the meetings were held in the participants' schools, they generally favored holding all meeting on campus (BT = 4.00; MT = 3.86); they also favored providing meals at some meetings (BT = 3.89; MT = 3.91) and snacks at the remaining meetings (BT = 4.21; MT

= 3.64). The participants preferred including about 30 minutes at most meetings for beginning teachers and mentors to meet as separate groups (BT = 3.58; MT = 3.60). Finally, the participants favored inviting to some meetings second-year teachers who were in the Program during their first year (BT = 3.58; MT = 3.41) and former mentors (BT = 3.32; MT = 3.51); they also favored inviting their building principals to one monthly meeting (BT = 3.68; MT = 3.45).

Program Consultants

Several items on the surveys focused on the participants' perceptions of the function and value of the Program Consultants (called "University Consultants" during 1990-91). The beginning teachers and mentors indicated their belief that the Program Consultant serves an important role in the Program (BT = 3.21; MT = 3.18). They preferred that the Program Consultant visits them twice each semester (BT = 3.26; MT = 2.95) rather than decreasing the visits to once each semester or increasing them to three times each semester. They also indicated a preference for the Program Consultant to meet with the beginning teacher and mentor at the same time (BT = 3.82; MT = 3.77) rather than separately (BT = 3.00; MT = 2.82). The participants indicated that the amount of time that the Program Consultant spent with them was adequate (BT = 3.56; MT = 3.52) and that the quality of this time was good (BT = 3.42; MT = 3.45). Finally, they indicated that the ability of the Program Consultant to answer their questions (BT = 3.95; MT = 3.64) and to provide them with help (BT = 3.68; MT = 3.64) was good.

Additional Issues

Three other items on the surveys should be noted. First, the beginning teachers and

mentors favored inviting the beginning teachers to attend selected meetings of "Principles of Mentoring" when topics such as classroom observations were being discussed (BT = 3.58; MT = 3.77). Second, participants only weakly supported the process used in their districts to identify and select mentors (BT = 3.26; MT = 2.55) and to match beginning teachers and mentors (BT = 3.32; MT = 2.77). Third, participants indicated some interest in extending the Program by including a second-year component (BT = 3.32; MT = 3.29).

Benefits

Several items on the surveys required the participants to consider what they had gained from the Program. The beginning teachers indicated a belief that they will be a better teacher next year because of their participation in the Program (BT = 3.95). More specifically, they suggest that being in the Program had improved their skills as a teacher (BT = 4.05), helped them to "settle in" to their work (BT = 4.00), activated their skills as a teacher (BT = 3.89), increased the likelihood that they will remain in teaching as a career (BT = 3.84), and increased their confidence as a teacher (BT = 3.79). Among eight advantages in working with their mentors, the beginning teachers cited understanding and carrying out school and district rules, policies, and procedures as the greatest benefit (BT = 4.47), followed by being made to feel welcome in the school (BT = 4.37), having someone to turn to to ask questions they would hesitate to ask anyone else (BT = 4.37), getting support and encouragement (BT = 4.32), and receiving useful feedback in developing their skills as teachers (BT = 4.26). The three remaining benefits for the beginning teacher were assistance in curriculum and content of their teaching assignment (BT = 4.16), help with teaching techniques, methods, and strategies (BT = 4.00), and help with classroom

management and discipline (BT = 3.68).

Among nine possible benefits of mentoring for the mentors, they rated having an opportunity to make an important contribution to their profession most highly (MT = 4.18). This was followed closely by personal (MT = 4.14) and professional (MT = 4.14) satisfaction. Other outcomes of mentoring rated by the mentors included increased skills as a teacher (MT = 4.09), heightened sensitivity to beginning teachers and their first year of work (MT = 4.09), learning about teaching, learning, and students from the beginning teachers they mentored (MT = 4.05), serving an important role in the professional development of a beginning teacher (MT = 3.95), becoming a more valuable employee of their school and district (MT = 3.95), and looking at the work of teaching in a different light (MT = 3.77).

As described above, the beginning teachers enroll each semester in a three credit course, and most mentors enroll in an introductory mentoring course in the fall semester, with the opportunity to enroll in an advanced mentoring course in the spring semester. Most of the teachers pay for a significant portion of the tuition for these courses, and sometimes for all of it. In spite of this, the beginning teachers rated the opportunity to earn six graduate credits as a very desirable feature of the Program (BT = 4.84). In fact, this item had a higher score for the beginning teachers than any other item on the survey. Furthermore, the mentors generally believed that "Principles of Mentoring" and "Enhancing the Role of the Mentor" helped them in their work as a mentor (MT = 3.95).

Future Directions

Plans are under way to provide even more linkages between present and past participants in the Program than already exist. The objective is to foster networking among past and present Program participants within their own districts and between different districts. For example, a picnic will be held during the summer of 1992. This picnic will be for former participants and for teachers who will participate in the Program during 1992-93. In addition, experienced mentors will be invited to make presentations at some class meetings of the introductory mentoring course. Finally, the Director will propose a third course for mentors which will be research-based and which will include a research project. This course, along with the first two mentoring courses and other courses related to mentoring, will be proposed as an area of emphasis in the UW-Whitewater Masters Degree in Curriculum and Instruction.